

# Freshman College Composition

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## Description of the Examination

The Subject Examination in Freshman College Composition measures the skills required in most first-year English courses. It addresses elements of language and grammar; various types of writing, both formal and informal; and limited analysis and interpretation of short passages of prose and poetry. The exam assumes that the candidate knows the fundamental principles of rhetoric and can apply the principles of standard written English. In addition, the exam requires familiarity with research papers and reference skills.

The exam has approximately 100 multiple-choice questions to be answered in two separately timed 45-minute sections.

An optional essay section also can be taken in addition to the multiple-choice test. The essay section is graded by the institution that requests it. Contact the college where you would like to receive credit for your CLEP exam to see if it requires the optional essay section for this exam.

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## Knowledge and Skills Required

The multiple-choice questions of the exam measure students' writing skills both at the sentence level and within the context of passages. Elements of language, grammar, different styles of writing, and limited literary analysis of short prose and poetry selections are tested. The exam is designed so that average students who have completed the first-year English requirement in composition can usually answer about half of the multiple-choice questions correctly.

**1. Ability to Recognize and Use Standard Written English --** The exam measures the candidate's awareness of a variety of logical, structural, and grammatical relationships within sentences. These skills are tested by approximately 20 percent of the multiple-choice questions in the exam. Questions test recognition of acceptable usage relating to:

- Syntax: parallelism, coordination, subordination, dangling modifiers
- Sentence boundaries (comma-splice, run-ons, sentence fragments)
- Recognition of correct sentences
- Sentence variety
- Concord/Agreement: subject-verb, verb tense, pronoun reference, shift, number
- Correct idiom
- Active/passive voice
- Logical comparison
- Test of punctuation

Several kinds of question formats throughout the exam are intended to measure the above skills:

- **Identifying Sentence Errors** - This type of question appears in Section I of the exam. It requires the candidate to identify wording that violates the standard conventions of written discourse.

- Improving Sentences - This type of question appears only in Section I of the exam. It requires the candidate to choose the version of a phrase, clause, or sentence that best conveys the intended meaning of a sentence.

**2. Ability to Recognize Logical Development** -- Questions in approximately 65 percent of the exam measure recognition of the following in the context of works in progress (student drafts) or of published prose.

Organization  
 Evaluation of evidence  
 Awareness of audience, tone, and purpose  
 Level of detail  
 Consistency of topic focus (sustaining coherence between paragraphs)  
 Sentence variety  
 Paragraph coherence  
 Main idea, thesis  
 Rhetorical effects and emphasis  
 Use of language  
 Evaluation of author's authority and appeal  
 Evaluation of reasoning  
 Shift in point of view

The following kinds of multiple-choice questions measure writing skills in context.

- Revising Work in Progress - This type of question appears in Section I of the exam. The candidate identifies ways to improve an early draft of an essay.
- Analyzing Writing - Two prose passages written in very different modes and a poetry selection appear in Section II of the exam. The candidate answers questions about each passage and poem and about the strategies used by the author of each selection.
- Analyzing and Evaluating Writers' Choices - This type of question appears in Section II of the exam. The candidate answers questions about tone, attitude, ambiguity, and clarity within short prompts.

**3. Ability to Use Resource Materials** -- Approximately 15 percent of the questions in Section I of the exam test the candidate's familiarity with the following basic reference skills, which are tested both in context and in individual questions.

Evaluating sources  
 Integrating resource material into the research paper  
 Manuscript format and documentation  
 Reference skills  
 Use of reference books

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## Study Resources

You will find books that are typically used as textbooks or reference books for first-year English composition and rhetoric courses useful in preparing for the Freshman College Composition exam. The books in the first group are valuable primarily as reference books; they include handbooks of grammar and manuals for writing papers and research papers. They offer guidance on the various elements of writing (sentences, paragraphs, essays) as well as examples illustrating acceptable usage and punctuation. As you attempt to develop and refine your writing skills, it is helpful to consult at least one book of this type.

The books in the second group are aids to improvement in reading comprehension and guides to different kinds of writing. They suggest ways to make your own writing interesting, effective, and suitable to a particular purpose, and they can help heighten your awareness about your writing.

Visit your local college bookstore to determine which textbooks are used by the college for English composition and rhetoric courses. When selecting a textbook, check the table of contents against the "Knowledge and Skills Required" section.

The suggestions and resources for preparing for the General Examination in English Composition will also be helpful in preparing for the Freshman College Composition exam.